

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF VIRGINIA  
Richmond Division

FEB 25 2011

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
RICHMOND, VA

BRIAN PAUL ENGEL,

Plaintiff,

v.

Civil Action No. 3:09CV586

SHERIFF FRANCIS,

Defendant.

**MEMORANDUM OPINION**

Plaintiff, a Virginia inmate, brings this civil action. The matter is before the Court for evaluation pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A.

**I. PROCEDURAL HISTORY**

The Magistrate Judge made the following findings and recommendations:

**Preliminary Review**

This Court must dismiss any action filed by a prisoner if the Court determines the action (1) "is frivolous" or (2) "fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted." 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2); *see* 28 U.S.C. § 1915A. The first standard includes claims based upon "an indisputably meritless legal theory," or claims where the "factual contentions are clearly baseless." *Clay v. Yates*, 809 F. Supp. 417, 427 (E.D. Va. 1992) (*quoting Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 327 (1989)). The second standard is the familiar standard for a motion to dismiss under Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b)(6).

"A motion to dismiss under Rule 12(b)(6) tests the sufficiency of a complaint; importantly, it does not resolve contests surrounding the facts, the merits of a claim, or the applicability of defenses." *Republican Party of N.C. v. Martin*, 980 F.2d 943, 952 (4th Cir. 1992) (*citing* 5A Charles A. Wright & Arthur R. Miller, *Federal Practice and Procedure* § 1356 (1990)). In considering a motion to dismiss for failure to state a claim, a plaintiff's well-pleaded allegations are taken as true and the complaint is viewed in the light most favorable to the plaintiff. *Mylan Labs., Inc. v. Matkari*, 7 F.3d 1130, 1134 (4th Cir. 1993); *see also* *Martin*, 980 F.2d at 952. This principle applies only to factual allegations, however, and "a court considering a motion to dismiss can choose to begin by identifying pleadings that, because they are no more than conclusions, are not entitled to the assumption of truth." *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 129 S. Ct. 1937, 1950 (2009).

The Federal Rules of Civil Procedure “require[] only ‘a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief,’ in order to ‘give the defendant fair notice of what the . . . claim is and the grounds upon which it rests.’” *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007) (second alteration in original) (*quoting Conley v. Gibson*, 355 U.S. 41, 47 (1957)). Plaintiffs can not satisfy this standard with complaints containing only “labels and conclusions” or a “formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of action.” *Bell Atlantic Corp.*, 550 U.S. at 555 (citations omitted). Instead, a plaintiff must allege facts sufficient “to raise a right to relief above the speculative level,” *id.* (citation omitted), stating a claim that is “plausible on its face,” *id.* at 570, rather than merely “conceivable.” *Id.* “A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.” *Iqbal*, 129 S. Ct. at 1949 (*citing Bell Atl. Corp.*, 550 U.S. at 556). Therefore, in order for a claim or complaint to survive dismissal for failure to state a claim, the plaintiff must “allege facts sufficient to state all the elements of [his or] her claim.” *Bass v. E.I. Dupont de Nemours & Co.*, 324 F.3d 761, 765 (4th Cir. 2003) (*citing Dickson v. Microsoft Corp.*, 309 F.3d 193, 213 (4th Cir. 2002); *Iodice v. United States*, 289 F.3d 270, 281 (4th Cir. 2002)). Lastly, while the Court liberally construes *pro se* complaints, *Gordon v. Leeke*, 574 F.2d 1147, 1151 (4th Cir. 1978), it does not act as the inmate’s advocate, *sua sponte* developing statutory and constitutional claims the inmate failed to clearly raise on the face of his complaint. *See Brock v. Carroll*, 107 F.3d 241, 243 (4th Cir. 1997) (Luttig, J., concurring); *Beaudett v. City of Hampton*, 775 F.2d 1274, 1278 (4th Cir. 1985).

### **Summary of Allegations and Claims**

The events described in Plaintiff’s complaint occurred at Southampton Jail (“the Jail”), Plaintiff’s previous place of incarceration. Plaintiff claims that the Jail’s fire safety preparations were inadequate. He explains that the Jail lacked sufficient fire extinguishers and sprinklers, and that there was no fire extinguisher at all on the second floor. Plaintiff also contends that staff at the Jail failed to remedy the situation, placing his safety at risk and causing him to become “emotionally distraught because this Sheriff[’s] department does not care for our safety.” (Compl. 5A (capitalization corrected).) Plaintiff seeks damages of \$1,000,000.

### **Analysis**

Prison conditions that amount to ““a serious deprivation of a basic human need”” violate the Eighth Amendment.<sup>1</sup> *Strickler v. Waters*, 989 F.2d 1375, 1379 (4th Cir. 1993) (*quoting Williams v. Griffin*, 952 F.2d 820, 824 (4th Cir. 1991)). The United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit has explained that a deprivation is not serious unless there is ““evidence of a *serious medical and emotional*

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<sup>1</sup> “Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.” U.S. Const. amend. VIII.

deterioration attributable to' the challenged condition." *Id.* at 1380 (*quoting Lopez v. Robinson*, 914 F.2d 486, 490 (4th Cir. 1990) (internal quotations omitted)). Thus, in order to state an Eighth Amendment claim, "a prisoner must allege 'a serious or significant physical or emotional injury resulting from the challenged conditions.'" *De'Lonta v. Angelone*, 330 F.3d 630, 634 (4th Cir. 2003) (*quoting Strickler*, 989 F.2d at 1381).<sup>2</sup> To the extent Plaintiff presents any live case or controversy at all, his bare allegation of emotional distress fails to demonstrate any serious or significant injury. Accordingly, it is RECOMMENDED that Plaintiff's claim be DISMISSED.

(September 17, 2010 Report and Recommendation.) The Court advised Plaintiff that he could file objections or an amended complaint within fourteen (14) days of the date of entry thereof. Plaintiff requested an extension of time to file his objections. (Docket No. 16.) The Court granted Plaintiff's request on October 14, 2010 and provided Plaintiff with ten (10) days from that date to comply with the September 17, 2010 Report and Recommendation. Plaintiff did not file objections or an amended complaint.

## **II. STANDARD OF REVIEW**

"The magistrate makes only a recommendation to this court. The recommendation has no presumptive weight, and the responsibility to make a final determination remains with this court." *Estrada v. Witkowski*, 816 F. Supp. 408, 410 (D.S.C. 1993) (*citing Mathews v. Weber*, 423 U.S. 261, 270-71 (1976)). This Court "shall make a de novo determination of those portions of the report or specified proposed findings or recommendations to which objection is made." 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1). "The filing of objections to a magistrate's report enables the district judge to focus attention on those issues-factual and legal-that are at the heart of the parties' dispute." *Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140, 147 (1985). This Court may adopt without *de novo* review any

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<sup>2</sup> Moreover, federal law prohibits any damages award "for mental or emotional injury suffered while in custody without a prior showing of physical injury." 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(e). Plaintiff does not allege the physical injury necessary to permit an award of damages.

portion of the magistrate judge's recommendation to which Plaintiff does not raise a specific objection. *See Diamond v. Colonial Life & Accident Ins. Co.*, 416 F.3d 310, 316 (4th Cir. 2005).

### III. CONCLUSION

Plaintiff having no objections, the Report and Recommendation will be ACCEPTED AND ADOPTED, and the action will be DISMISSED WITH PREJUDICE for failure to state a claim. The Clerk will be DIRECTED to note the disposition of the action for purposes 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g).

An appropriate Order will accompany this Memorandum Opinion.

Date: 2-25-11  
Richmond, Virginia

/s/  
James R. Spencer  
Chief United States District Judge